

2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention & Trade Show

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Drought Strategies

Experts urge producers to use proactive strategy when managing for drought.

Story & photos by **Steve Suther**

NASHVILLE, TENN. (Jan. 31, 2007) — Planning for drought *during* a drought is like packing a parachute after jumping from the plane, said Ron Gill, Texas A&M University. He and Jane Parish, Mississippi State University, and Ivan Rush, University of Nebraska, presented better options to producers at Wednesday's Cattlemen's College.®

The sooner you can act, the less effect it will have on your herd, Gill said. He listed four common mistakes producers make:

- ▶ doing nothing (hope it goes away);
- ▶ weaning early but keeping all cows;

- ▶ retaining the youngest females at the expense of more productive cows; and
- ▶ selling a few cattle at a time to buy hay for the rest until everything is gone.

Instead of falling into the trap of making those common mistakes, Gill advised selling enough cows early that you can put cash aside. If you overestimate culling, sell expensive hay.

Research shows old cows can breed back in poor conditions more easily than heifers, regardless of body condition score. Drought is a good opportunity to group your calving season by culling those outside of a 60-day

window. While palpating, take note of teeth, udders and anything that you can use to rank cows for possible culling.

Strategies should aim to preserve income from the current year's calves, he said. Weaning those calves should be one of the last responses, as that only means a 15% reduction in stocking rate.

Rush presented advantages of early weaning, noting that research studies have defined the term "early calving" differently. In the 1960s, some research was done on weaning week-old beef calves. More recently, studies from Nebraska to Ohio have looked

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▶ Planning for drought during a drought is like packing a parachute after jumping from the plane, said Texas A&M's Ron Gill.



▶ Jane Parish, Mississippi State University, presented options for better drought management during the Cattlemen's College.



▶ Nebraska's Ivan Rush explained the advantages of early weaning as a drought-management strategy.



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Drought Strategies CONTINUED

at 60- to 75-day weaning. On the other hand, producers may consider that weaning a week earlier than last year is weaning early.

Rush said weaning at 4 to 5 months of age is a practical plan for many producers who decide to try it.

Gill, Parish and Rush presented their comments Jan. 31 during the Cattlemen's College session "PR201: Drought Arithmetic for Cowboys" at the 2007 Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show in Nashville. The Cattlemen's College is sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health. Proceedings to the presentations by Parish and Gill are posted to the www.4cattlemen.com newsroom. Audio files of the session will be available within two weeks of the conference.

For more information on drought management, visit www.angusjournal.com/drought. This topic site is compiled by Angus Productions Inc. (API) as a portal to information available on the Web about managing cattle for drought.



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